The Progressive Review

261

Jan-Feb 1987

Chernobyl USA

A Chernobyl-style nuclear accident in the US could force the evacuation of millions of Americans — many would have to leave permanently. In six American cities alone, some fifty million people live within 50 miles of a nuclear plant. And while total evacuation in the Chernobyl accident only extended to a 18.6 mile radius from the plant, some towns as far away as 50 miles were evacuated because of radioactive hotspots.

How ready is the government and the nuclear industry for such an accident here? Not very. Pre-Three Mile Island, the emergency zone around plants extended only two miles. Subsequently a ten-mile emergency planning zone was created, although the nuclear industry is trying to get that compressed based on research that suggests that the consequences of an accident would be far less than previously believed. This despite the experience of Chernobyl and the fact that the US government advised US residents in Kiev, 80 miles from Chernobyl, to evacuate.

Not only is the ten mile emergency zone far too small in the view of many experts, including those at the Nuclear Information and Resource Service, but it is not clear that the utilities and government are prepared evacuate the areas already defined as in danger. One problem is the fact that people hearing of the accident will evacuate whether they are in the zone or not. At Three Mile Island, for example, not only did the three thousand people ordered to evacuate leave their homes, but some 200,000 others did as well — some as far as 25 miles from the plant. Surveys of residents near other plants reveal the same pattern: 50-65% of the respondents leaving within a 25-mile zone said they would leave if those within the ten mile zone were told to evacuate. As Michael Mariotte of NIRS points out: "There would be far more people and traffic on the roads than current emergency plans take into account. This could lead to much longer evacuation times than now believed, which in turn could cause higher casualties among those closest to the reactor. EPZs must be large enough to account for this phenomenon."

Additionally, there are numerous practical problems with current evacuations plans. Some examples:

- Sirens used to warn residents have been inadequately tested under adverse conditions such as at night or when summer air conditioning is on.
- Utilities are required to list what medical services might be available, but are not required to determine whether these services are adequate.
- Reliance on volunteers, and even contracted workers, to aid in the evacuation zones is open to question. At a recent drill at Seabrook, for example, there were 111 fewer drivers, 45 fewer buses and 8 fewer vans than called for in the emergency plan. In a real emergency, one bus company estimated than no more than ten percent of its drivers would show up.

There is a move in some localities to increase the emergency zone to 40 miles and NIRS says the absolute minimum should be 20 miles. In some cases, such as Long Island's Shoreham plant, evacuation may be totally unrealistic, the position taken by New York Governor Cuomo and Suffolk County officials.

Info: Nuclear Information and Resource Service, 1616 P NW #160, DC 20036 (202-328-0002)

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What's the difference between the National Security Council and a day care center? A day care center has adult supervision. — **Anonymous**

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An alternative budget

The Jobs with Peace Campaign, drawing on the Dellums-Schroeder alternative defense budget for 1987, has recommended $80 billion in savings to be replaced with $80 billion in new or improved services. Cuts include:

- Cancel the MX, Star Wars, B-1, Pershing II, Minuteman and cruise missiles, the Stealth bomber, new funds for Trident subs and missiles, and any further nuclear warhead production. (-$29 billion)

- Reduce funding for weapons designed only to threaten or invade mostly Third World countries. Eliminate military aid to governments which are major human rights violaters. Trim NATO and other troops. (-$26 billion)

- Cut Pentagon and military contractor waste, fraud and abuse in half through new contracting procedures. Cancel weapons systems which are redundant or proven to be ineffective. (—$25 billion)

With the money saved, there would be funds for:

- 195,000 low income housing units. Weatherizing one million homes. Renewing rural housing programs. (+$18 billion)

- Supporting the School Excellence and Reform Act. Increasing student loans for higher education. (+$6 billion)

- Reducing hunger. Begin to bring AFDC recipients up to the poverty line. Increasing Medicare and Medicaid. (+$16 billion)

- Rebuilding highways and mass transit systems. Increasing funds for water resource management. Cleaning up 850 toxic waste sites. (+$15 billion)

- Providing additional funding to credit programs for family farmers (+$5 billion)

- Creating productive jobs in the construction and repair of bridges, waterways and other public infrastructure. Supporting youth employment programs. Helping retrain workers displaced due to military spending cuts. (+20 billion).

Jobs with Peace estimates that such a program could add hundreds of thousands of new jobs. (Jobs with Peace, 76 Summer Street, Boston, MA 02110; Rep. Ronald Dellums and Patricia Shroeder, both at House of Representatives, DC 20515).

Liberal revival

The latest voting record from Americans for Democratic Action shows that liberal Democrats did quite well last fall. In closely contested Senate elections where both candidates had been rated by ADA, the average for winning candidates was 53.5%; their opponents averaged 18%. The average score for reelected incumbent senators was 43.75%; defeated senators averaged only 15.3%. ADA also reports that the average score for senate committee chairs last year was 28; in the new Congress it is 63.

Top ranked senators with a score of 100 were: Sarbanes, Burdick and Metzenbaum

Senators with a score of 95: Cranston, Hart, Riegle

Senators with a score of 90: Inouye, Harkin, Kerry, Levin, Melcher.

Senators with a score of 85: Dodd, Matsunaga, Mitchell, Eagleton, Bradley, Lautenberg, Moynihan, Leahy

Senators with a score of 80: Weicker, Biden, Simon, Mathias, Kennedy, Baucus

Falling off the top list this year: Pell, Pryor

New this year: Weicker, Biden, Mathias, Baucus.

The only Democratic presidential possibilities from the Senate who don't make the top list are Bumpers (70) and Nunn (30). On the Repubican side we find Dole (0) and Laxalt (0). On the House side Gephardt got a 70. The new House speaker, Jim Wright got an 80.

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What did the press know and when did it know it?

The Iran-Contra affair was far from the first time that the Reagan administration has lied, cheated or broken the law. But it was the first time the media, as a whole, pointed this out clearly to its readers and viewers. Those wondering why the administration felt it could act with impunity will not find the answer in the basement of the White House. Rather, they will find it in the pages and videotapes of the nation's media over the past six years, where the dissembling of the president has been passed over lightly, the violation of national and international law has been treated as a technical matter of minimal concern and the efforts to disinform the public has been regarded as a sign of superior political capability.

Thus the illegal invasion of Grenada and the mining of Nicaraguan waters and "spin control" and draconian measures to restrict the flow of governmental information have drifted into the public consciousness as part of the normality of the age, rather than as events and actions that shock and disturb.

And because the Reaganites knew they could, with a paltry few exceptions, count on the press to condone, exonerate or ignore what it was doing, the Iran gambit must have seemed both plausible and safe. When the watchdog doesn't bark, only wags its tail and licks you, you give it a biscuit and go right on in.

The Iran-Contra affair is, then, not just a tale of failure on the part of the Reagan administration — it, after all, was operating true to form, only more so; it is also a tale of failure on the part of those that Americans rely upon to tell them what is happening in Washington. The former deceived, the latter ignored, and here we are.

Eventually, the failures of the Reaganistas caught up with them, but the shameful history of the Washington press over the past six years remains classified, sealed and protected by the executive privilege that the media invokes on its own behalf.

There are at least three important reasons why purportedly independent journalists in Washington have served as such willing accomplices to the White House:

• **News that is easy to cover outplays news that is hard to cover:** The White House, with its focus on one individual and a relatively small high-level staff, is far simpler to write about than, say, Congress or fifty state legislatures. The media loves centralized news and becomes frustrated or confused by decentralized events. Thus, without any ideological intent, the media has a natural drift towards any form of authority and a corresponding drift away from decentralized occurences. This is one of the reasons the Vietnam War was so badly covered. The media couldn't find it. Today, the Middle East presents many of the same coverage problems and the reportage reflects it. Similarly mass movements without central leadership, such as the decision by Americans not to have so many children, tend to be grossly underplayed. Thus, despite our allegedly tripartite and federal system of government, the media, given a choice, will favor the White House over the other political institutions of the country. The move towards what has been called the "imperial presidency" partially reflects the media's effort to make life easier for itself.

• **The media suffers from a sense of social insecurity:** Thirty years ago, many reporters in this country did not have a college education. An advanced degree was rare and, indeed, somewhat suspicious. In aggregate, the press represented the values and concerns of middle America. In recent decades, the media has, with no small help from the propagandistic potential of its own facilities, risen dramatically in both caste and income. The result has been not only a cultural gap

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with the Reagan coterie and their power and glamor. The preoccupation of the press with power, in no small part, is a reflection of its own social ambitions rather than an accurate description of the world. The erstwhile dictim that the only way for a journalist to look at a politician is down his nose has been replaced by the dictim: don't bite the source that feeds and glamorizes you. Here again occurs an inexorably drift towards overemphasis on the White House and uncritical acceptance of its words and thoughts.

• **The ideology of objectivity makes the press pawns of the powerful:** As everyone except those in the trade seems to understand, objectivity is a philosophical theory rather than a scientific standard. Many of its adherants regard it, however, as the equivalent of fact much as advocates of creationism argue that it is the scientific co-equal of evolution. In truth, objectivity has more in common with creationism, broad churchism. ritualism and Puseyism than it does with the principles of evolution or quantum mechanics.

This creates an endless series of traps into which the media falls daily. In the present instance, much of the miscoverage of the Reagan administration has been due to the fallacy of the official source.

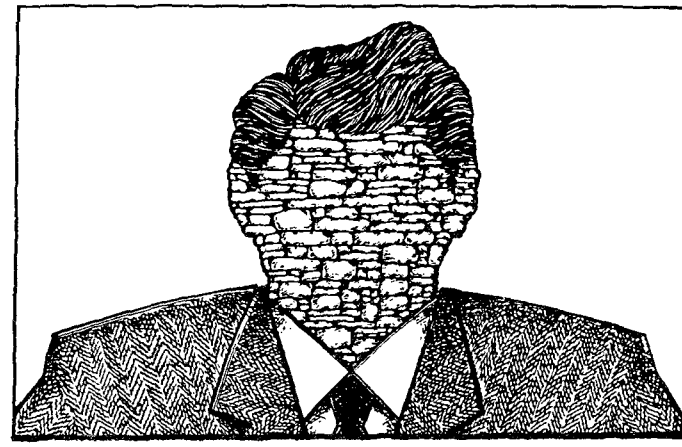
The trap is created something like this:

- The press believes in printing the truth.
- The press believes that "official sources" are more reliable than "unofficial sources."
- Therefore, the press tends to quote the former more often than the later, and to raise questions more often about the latter than about the former. Further, it appears to the media that it is easier to find a newsworthy official source than a trustworthy unofficial source. And a lie from an official source is generally considered more newsworthy than the truth from an unofficial source — unless the truth, independent of the question of its veracity, will have an impact on public events.

The logic of this disappears, however, the moment that official sources are ignorant, misinformed or begin lying. Certainly, over the past six years, official sources in the Reagan admnistration have not been high on accuracy. This has done nothing to diminish their quotability in the minds of the press, which has thus placed itself in the position of transmitting a stream of misinformation and disinformation to the public. The only truth that the press has published is that the government official said what was said, which, if the statement turns out to be wrong, is not a particularly helpful piece of information.

The media could mitigate its role as a propaganda medium by placing more value on what the government does than it does on what it says. This would require a more vigorous style of reporting than is currently popular. It might leave some journalists in a quandry as to what to write about. They could no longer pad their columns with other people's speeches and bullet quotes and news releases. But it would be a boon to the reader and the viewer. We might even learn, for example, what a "controversial bill" was about, rather than mainly what the President and congressional leaders thought about it. Or where American troops were and what they were up to, rather than an overemphasis on strategic debates. Official pronouncements could be relegated to the back pages under just such a heading. With good editing, and a nice mixture of the sublime and ridiculous, it might even be readable. Casper Weinberger would still be quoted, but in the eight-point type he deserves. And fact and fantasy would no longer be so promiscuously mixed on the front pages, leaving the public totally confused as to what is going on.

Further, if public officials are to be quoted as to factual matters, it must not be assumed that they are any more knowledgeable than non-public experts. Virtually alone amongst the major media, National Public Radio and McNeil-Lehrer seem to understand this and assiduously interview sources outside government that otherwise get little attention. NPR, for example, kept far ahead of the television networks following the Chernobyl disaster by interviewing academic experts rather than relying upon government sources who, at best pulled their punches and spoke in newspeak. For too many other reporters, however, the words of those in power suffice for their standard of objectivity and they end up sounding like just so many assistant White House press secretaries — Sam Smith



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HELP-GET ME THE POLICE!!
CERTAINLY, MA'AM... WOULD THAT BE THE DRUG POLICE, THE SOBRIETY POLICE, THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE POLICE, THE PORNO POLICE, THE DOMESTICATION CURFEW POLICE, OR THE REGULAR OLD CRIME POLICE?
...HELLO?..
COLLEGE PRESS SERVICE

WEATHER REPORT

NUKE NOTES

● The Energy Department has announced a six-month shutdown of the Hanford, Washington, nuclear reactor, used for weapons production, to make safety modifications. The plant is of graphite core design, similar to that at Chernobyl... Meanwhile, questions have been raised as to possible large natural gas deposits in the Hanford area, creating the issue of contamination of what could be one of the largest of the nation's yet untapped supplies.

● Seven of the ten nuclear free initiatives on the ballot last November were successful. All except one were on the west coast.

CIVIL LIBERTIES

● The City of Philadelphia has agreed to pay over 1400 people a total of $500,000 for the violation of their 4th Amendment rights during a drug sweep called "Operation Cold Turkey." People were stopped, searched and questioned, and while only 80 possessed narcotics many others were charged with such offenses as disorderly conduct (for being where they were). The ACLU won the case, but the problem remains in other cities, including Washington.

● There were 130 attempts to censor library and public school books and curricula last year, according to People for the American Way. This is up 35% from the previous year. Among the books targeted were The Color Purple, Romeo and Juliet, Huckleberry Finn, Brave New World, Catcher in the Rye and Macbeth.

● Growing concern among progressive groups as reports mount of covert action against American peace groups. The FBI is known to have infiltrated one peace group in Texas. (Village Voice, Dec. 16)

THE ENVIRONMENT

● The Environmental Protection Agency predicts that millions of skin cancer cases will develop in coming years because of ozone depletion. The estimate is sharply higher than that of even some environmental groups. The Reagan administration has recommended a "near-term freeze" on the manufacture of materials that deplete the ozone layer.

STAR WARS

● A survey by the Cornell Institute for Social and Economic research finds that scientists in fields relevant to Star Wars opose it by a margin of eight to one.

CENTRAL AMERICA

● Congressmember Barbara Boxer, writing for Recon news service, reports that the Pentagon may be violating the law by using Army reservists in Central America for longer than 180 days without specific funding and authorization by Congress.

● Some 50,000 college students have signed a petition, circulated on some 120 campuses, calling for an end to Contra aid and support of

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NERVE GAS testing in your backyard? Find out with a free copy of the Winter RECON, PO Box 14602, Philadelphia, PA 19134

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Buying Freedom

Belatedly, there is a growing interest in the development of self-help black economic power. For example, Buy Freedom was founded a year ago to identify and support black-owned businesses that all take a five point-pledge to treat all customers with courtesy, offer competitive prices, give price discounts (if possible); create new jobs (when possible); and become involved in the life of the black community. Here is an excerpt from a recent speech given by black TV journalist Tony Brown in DC on behalf of Buy Freedom, as transcribed by New Options newsletter:

> *Ladies and gentlemen, we are not poor, and we are not a minority. We are a cultural-economic market that has been trained to behave as a poor minority. There are more blacks in America than Canadians in Canada, and as many blacks in America as Poles in Poland. Last year we earned in excess of $200 billion. We spent in excess of $180 billion. . . .*
>
> *Today we are 11% of the population. We buy 18% of the barbeque, 20% of the rice, 26% of the Cadillac cars. 56% of us own our own homes, 26% of us travel exclusively by airplane, 40% of all records purchased are purchased by black teens. . . . If you took blacks out of America, Wall Street would collapse last week!* [laughter and cheers].
>
> *Why is it, then, that we have that much money, but we do not have what whites have? Simple. Whites spend their money with whites, and blacks spend their money with whites* [laughter].
>
> *Every other ethnic and racial group in America turns their money over in their own communities from five to 12 times before one penny leaves. They spend their money at a 360-degree angle so* [pounds podium] *it comes right back to them. In the black community, we turn our money over with one another less than once. We spend it at an 180-degree angle: directly away from ourselves.*
>
> *How can you have what white people have? Just be simple and logical about our condition. How can you have what I have with you spending 95% on me and 5% on yourself? Blacks spend 6.6% of their money with another black person—a black business or professional. We spend almost 95% of our money outside our neighborhoods.*

Buy Freedom has over 100 business members in DC so far (New Options, PO Box 18324, DC 200036; Buy Freedom, 1501 Broadway, #2014, NYC NY 10036. You can also obtain a two-hour recording of Brown's speech for a $12 check made out to Tony Brown Productions at the Buy Freedom address)

the Contadora peace plan. The petition drive continues through mid-February. (Info: National Student Action Center, PO Box 15599, DC 20003

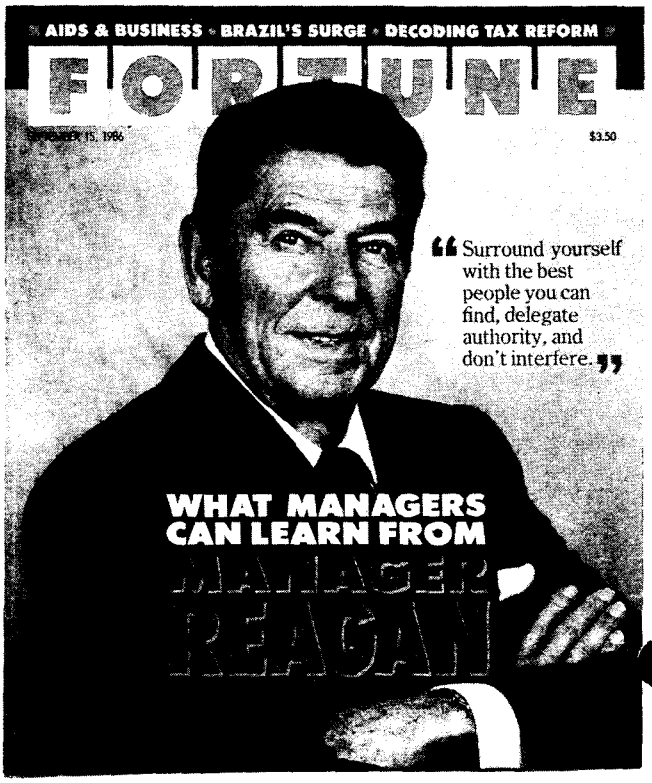
ECONOMICS

- The demand for emergency food for the poor and homeless increased about 25% in 1986 according to a report to the US Conference of Mayors.
- The Democratic staff of the Joint Economic Committee has prepared a study that gues that weak economic growth rather than family dissolution was the main reason for the sharp rise in poverty between 1979 and 1986.

PEOPLE TO WATCH

Former Senator John Tower, co-chair of the White House Iran commission, is the brother-in-law of **Sam Cummings,** head of Interarms, the largest private arms dealing firm in the world. **Robert McFarlane,** was once on Tower's senatorial staff. The other co-chair, **Edmund Muskie,** played a major role on Nestle's Instant Formula Audit Commission, which is credited with taking the heat off Nestle for its sales of infant formula to the Third World. Nestle won a Silver Anvil Award last year from the Public Relations Society of America for its strategy. **Frank Carlucci,** new NSC head, was political officer at the US Embassy in Leopoldville when Congo leader Patrice Lumumba was murdered. In 1964 he was

Great Moments in Journalism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$3.50
"Surround yourself with the best people you can find, delegate authority, and don't interfere."
WHAT MANAGERS CAN LEARN FROM
MANAGER REAGAN

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expelled from Zanzibar for plotting the overthrow of the country's leader. In 1965 he assisted in the removal of President Kasavubu of the Congo and his replacement by Gen. Joseph Mobutu. In the 1970s he was involved in American efforts to resist the growth of radical politics in Portugal and as Deputy Director of the CIA helped in an abortive attempt to destabilize South Yemen. He also lobbied Congress successfully to exempt the CIA from certain provisions of the Freedom of Information Act and developed a close relationship with General Richard Secord. His last known employment was at Sears World Trade, described in Fortune as the subject of speculation among international traders that it was a front for US intelligence activities. (Covert Action Bulletin, Winter 1986, Box 50272, DC 20004 and the Nation, Dec 20)

ORGANIZING

• ACORN, the community organizing group, got involved in a number of successful senatorial campaigns, including those of Tom Daschle, Wyche Fowler, John Breaux and Tim Wirth. One failure: Bob Edgar's campaign in Pennsylvania.

FARMING

• A recent conference on farming near cities, held at Tufts University, brought a reccomendation for "metropolitan food plans" to encourage agriculture near cities from Roger Blobaum of the Family Farm Defense Fund. Also on hand was Booker Wheatley, of Montgomery, Alabama, who has developed a system of pre-season contracts with consumers. He plants; they harvest. Stewart Smith of Tufts University pointed to the potential for small farmers near cities to "market higher in the food chain" by on-farm processing of food. (Alternative Agriculture News, 9200 Edmunston Rd, #117, Greenbelt Md 20770)

• Nearly all of New England's dairy farmers are organizing a cartel to help push up wholesale milk prices and help in dealing with marketers. Says New Hampshire state agriculture commissioner Stephen Taylor: "It's vital. We are losing dairy farms in New England at the rate of one a day."

NEW ZEALAND

• Last month, the Reagan administration was reported preparing a plan for economic penalties against New Zealand because of its ban on American nuclear ships. Included would be a ban imports of New Zealand agricultural products.

• 75% of all murders in the US involve people who know each other. They are crimes of passion, therefore unpremeditated and unaffected by fears of punishment.

• Between 1928 and 1961, the murder rate in states with the death penalty was 6.93 per 100,000 people; without it, the rate was 2.73 per 100,000 people.

• In Canada, the murder rate was 3.09 the year after the abolition of the death penalty; several years later, it dropped to 2.74.

• 54% of those executed since 1930 have been black. Blacks comprise only 11% of the population.

• In Georgia, blacks whose victims were white are eleven times more likely to receie a death sentence than any other type of homicide.

• Since 1972, 62% of the people on death row have been unskilled, service or domestic workers and 60% were unemployed at the time of their crimes.

• In Texas, 3 out of 4 convicted murderers with state-appointed attorneys were sentenced to death, as opposed to only 1 out 3 who were able to pay private attorneys.

• In New York, a murder trial and first appeal cost the taxpayer $1.8 million as opposed to the $600,000 it costs to keep a prisoner in jail for 40 years.

• Since 1900, 25 people were executed who were later proved to have been innocent. 343 have been released from death row on the discovery of evidence that cleared them. —Jan Wiersma, Northern Sun News Based on statistics from criminal justice consultant Robert Domer, Canton, Ohio, and Amnesty International

What did the president know? He doesn't know. — **Garry Wills**

This president is much different (from Richard Nixon). The last two times when we've gotten together, he's started off by telling a story. Just a little Irish story. That son of a gun is really one of the great guys. I envy him for his ability to say, 'Have you heard the one about...?' —**House Minority Leader Robert Michel.**

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WOMEN

• Belgium has established an office of secretary of state for social emancipation to look after women's issues. The French, on the other hand, abolished their ministry for women's rights last spring. There is some talk that the office's duties will be taken over by a new department called the Ministry for the Rights of Man.

What's happening

The Jewish Women's Newsletter offers news, features and resources for Jewish women. PO Box 335, Berkeley, CA 94701.

Career Opportunities in the CIA: pamphlet making the case against the CIA on campus. Free from Radical Education Project, Box 606 Memorial Union, 800 Langdon St, Madison WI 53706.

ACORN, a grassroots organization of low and moderate income people is seeking organizers to work with its local chapters in 22 states. ACORN has worked on such issues as homelessness, jobs, and fair banking. Sue Hutchinson, ACORN, 300 Flatbush Ave, Brooklyn NY 11217 (718-789-5600)

Freedom in Central America

• Infant mortality in Honduras is the second highest in the western hemisphere.

• 72% of Honduran children under five suffer some form of malnutrition.

• 57% of the Honduran population lives in extreme povery.

• Unemployment among Hondurans is 24%.

• Honduran GNP was at a -1.5% rate in 1982.

• In El Salvador, since 1980, 60,000 have been killed, almost always by "security forces."

• El Salvador has 1.4 million war-displaced persons. 700,000 are homeless.

• Guatemala has 120,000 orphans, many made orphans by "security forces."

—Central American Report

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